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# GULF TIMES SPORT

Football

## Troubled Pogba sinks to new low after doping revelation

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FOOTBALL

# Russia score late for 1-1 draw against Qatar

By Sports Reporter  
Doha

**Q**atar were held to a 1-1 draw by Russia in a friendly match after Aleksandr Soldatenkov struck late in the 89th minute at the Al Janoub Stadium yesterday. It was a disappointing result for Qatar, after the hosts had conceded in the stoppage time to lose against Kenya in another friendly last week.

If Carlos Queiroz had any hopes of getting his squad in shape for the 2026 World Cup qualifiers, then the veteran Portuguese coach would have been left with more questions than answers.

Unlike against Kenya, Queiroz fielded a stronger XI with Akram Afif and Almoez Ali starting up-front. Both were off their best as Afif missed an open goal in the

67th minute, while Ali - playing as a centre-forward - never posed much of a threat.

Al Gharafa forward Ahmed Alaaeldin, who replaced Almoez in the second half, put the hosts in front with a superb header. Alaaeldin leaped higher than the Russian defence to connect Homam al-Amin's cross and put the ball past substitute goalkeeper Ilya Lantratov.

But home fans were left frustrated as Russia, who were a constant threat in the second half, equalised after substitute Soldatenkov nodded home in the 89th minute. The 26-year-old planted the ball past Saad al-Sheeb off a corner kick from Maksim Glushenkov.

Qatar's Hassan al-Haydos, who came on as substitute in the second half, said he was pleased with the team's performance in the two friendly matches. "The perform-

ance was good overall which we can count on in the forthcoming matches as we are preparing to defend our Asian Cup title," al-Haydos said.

"Qatar squad is one unit and each and every member of this squad is looking to give his best. These friendly matches were a good experience and we are looking forward to bringing improvement."

Now Qatar are slated to play another friendly against Iraq next month, before they get down to serious business with World Cup Qualifiers beginning in November.

Qatar's forward Ahmed Alaaeldin (third right) celebrates with teammates after scoring against Russia in a friendly match at the Al Janoub Stadium in Al Wakra yesterday. (AFP)



QTERMINALS QATAR CLASSIC 2023

# Farag marches on as Makin extends dream run in Doha

MOMEN STOPS QATAR'S AL-TAMIMI AS LOBBAN STUNS CROUIN

By Sports Reporter  
Doha

**T**op seed Ali Farag of Egypt yesterday reached the quarter-finals of QTerminals Qatar Classic 2023 with a straight-game demolition of compatriot Fares Dessouky while giant-killer Joel Makin of Wales stunned Mohamed ElSherbini of Egypt for a place in the last-eight.

Also yesterday, Qatar's Mohamed Abdullah al-Tamimi failed to get past eighth seed Tarek Momen who won 11-8, 12-10, 7-11, 11-8 in 53 minutes. Momen will now take on Farag in the quarter-finals tomorrow at the Glass Court of Khalifa International Tennis and Squash Complex.

Makin, who shocked Paul Coll of New Zealand on Monday, yesterday proved too wily for ElSherbini on his way to a 11-8, 11-3, 11-7 victory in 41 minutes.

In a thrilling battle, Scotland's Greg Lobban stunned last year's runners-up Victor Crouin of France in five games of exhilarating squash.

Lobban, winner of 12 career titles, yesterday clinched his win with a 5-11, 12-10, 9-11, 12-10, 11-7 scoreline.

"I think in the third game... I really had to give myself a kick and tell myself 'I'm in it here, I just need to string a few points together,'" Lobban said after the pulsating clash.

"I'm just so happy to put myself in this position, in the last eight in one of the biggest tournaments in the world after a long time of trying so I'm stoked," he added.

Yesterday's win means that Lobban will face Makin in his first Platinum tournament quarter-final.

It was Lobban's second win over Crouin. Lobban beat Crouin in four games when the two met on the PSA World Tour in 2019 while competing at Cleveland Skating Club Open 2019.

In the women's draw, Belgium's Tinne Gillis came back to beat World No.4 Joelle King for a place in the quarter-finals of the \$187,500 tournament.

Gillis won 10-12, 10-12, 11-9, 11-4, 11-5 in 67 minutes to set up



Top seed Ali Farag (left) of Egypt is seen with compatriot Fares Dessouky after their third-round match at QTerminals Qatar Classic at Khalifa International Tennis and Squash Complex in Doha yesterday.



Qatar's Mohamed Abdullah al-Tamimi (right) congratulates eighth seed Tarek Momen of Egypt after their third-round clash yesterday.

a clash against Salma Hany who beat Canada's Hollie Naughton 11-8, 11-4, 11-4 (28m).

"The first two games could have gone either way, and I was a bit frustrated at myself that I didn't get at least one of them," Gillis, 25, said after the match.

"I was just happy I had (England No.1 Georgina Kennedy) in

my corner to lift me up again even though I was 2-0 down," she added.

"I'm very proud that I managed to stay mentally focused today. I didn't change much of my game plan, I just tried not to rush and just tried to focus on each shot," Gillis said.

Also yesterday, second seed

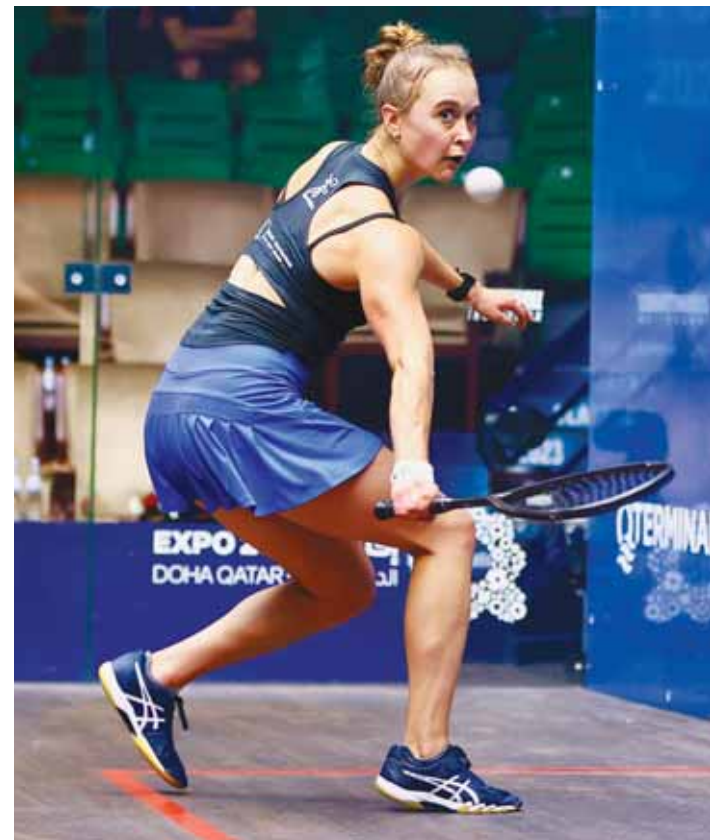


Scotland's Greg Lobban stretches for a return against seventh seed Victor Crouin of France yesterday.

Nour El Sherbini of Egypt beat compatriot Rowan Alaraby 10-12, 11-4, 11-4, 11-2 in 41 minutes. El Sherbini will take on Gillis in the quarter-finals tomorrow.

'Amazing memories'

"I have amazing memories on this court. I won my second World Junior Championship title here.



Tinne Gillis of Belgium in action against fourth seed Joelle King of New Zealand yesterday.

and it's a privilege for us to be here and play," she added.

Meanwhile Saad al-Muhanadi, a member of the organising committee of the QTerminals Qatar Classic 2023, said Doha is honoured to have welcomed back women's squash after a lengthy absence.

"We are happy with the level of squash matches we are seeing, whether in the men's or women's competitions. The truth is that the return of the women's competition after an eight-year hiatus has contributed to us witnessing exhilarating squash," al-Muhanadi said in an interview. "We expect the level of competition to rise as we reach the knockout stages of the tournament," he added.

Regarding the participation of Qatari players, he said: "This tournament is a good opportunity for the players of the national squash team to gain more experience and interact with international stars in the game."

Action at the Khalifa International Tennis and Squash Complex continues today.

ASIA CUP

# Wellalage's valiant effort in vain as India beat Sri Lanka to reach final

Kuldeep takes four wickets including the final two as India defended 213



Kuldeep Yadav picked up four wickets to lead India to close win over Sri Lanka. (AFP)

AFP  
Colombo

**K**uldeep Yadav starred as India overcame a brilliant all-round effort from Sri Lanka's Dunith Wellalage to win a tense Asia Cup clash by 41 runs yesterday and book a place in the final. Kuldeep took four wickets including the final two as India defended 213, bowling out Sri Lanka for 172 to silence a large home crowd at Colombo's R. Premadasa Stadium.

India recorded their second straight Super Four win in the 50-over tournament, a prelude to the upcoming ODI World Cup, and ended Sri Lanka's 13-match winning streak in ODIs. Wellalage, who claimed his maiden ODI five-wicket haul, remained unbeaten on 42 when he ran out of partners as left-arm wrist spinner Kuldeep wrapped up the opposition tail in 41.3 overs.

"Kuldeep is a great bowler, I tried to play my normal game with a positive mindset," said Wellalage, who was named man of the match despite being on the losing team. "I want to thank my teammates and my coaching staff - they gave me great support."

India skipper Rohit Sharma praised Kuldeep, who also took five wickets in his team's previous win over Pakistan, for his rhythm and consistency. "For the past year or so, bowling really, really well. He has

done a lot of hard work on his rhythm," said Rohit. "He went back to the drawing board and worked on it. The ball is coming out nicely and you can see the results in the last 10 ODIs."

It was India's third straight day on the field after they crushed Pakistan by 228 runs on Monday in a match that was played across two days due to rain. The next Super Four match between Sri Lanka and Pakistan tomorrow will decide the second finalists between the two teams.

Rohit, who entered an elite list of players with over 10,000 ODI runs and hit his second successive fifty, scored 53 to hand his team a brisk start but Wellalage hit back. The 20-year-old returned figures of 5-40 including the key wickets of Rohit and Virat Kohli with strong support from part-time spinner Charith Asalanka, who claimed four victims for 18 runs.

Wellalage struck with his first ball of the match when he bowled Shubman Gill for 19 and there was no looking back for the young spinner. He made the home fans erupt with the wicket of Kohli who fell for three a day after an unbeaten 122 against Pakistan at the same venue. Rohit was also bowled by Wellalage who snared his third scalp in three overs.

Ishan Kishan, who made 33, and previous-match centurion KL Rahul attempted to rebuild the innings with a stand of 63. Wellalage ended that partnership when he



Sri Lanka's Dunith Wellalage celebrates after taking the wicket of India's KL Rahul during the Asia Cup Super Four ODI match in Colombo yesterday. (AFP)

got Rahul caught and bowled for 39 and then took his fifth. Asalanka kept chipping away from the other end and was on a hat-trick with India on 186-9, but Axar Patel took the total past 200 after a nearly 45-minute rain break and hit 26.

India hit back with regular wickets and Jasprit Bumrah struck twice. Asalanka attempted to increase the run-rate but became Kuldeep's second wicket. Dhananjaya de Silva fought back along with Wellalage in a threatening seventh-wicket stand of 63

but Ravindra Jadeja broke the partnership with the wicket of De Silva for 41.

**BRIEF SCORES**

**India 213 all out in 49.1 overs** (R. Sharma 53, KL Rahul 39, I. Kishan 33; D. Wellalage 5-40, C. Asalanka 4-18) **bt Sri Lanka 172 all out in 41.3 overs** (D. de Silva 41, D. Wellalage 4-2 not out; K. Yadav 4-43, J. Bumrah 2-30, R. Jadeja 2-33)  
**Result:** India won by 41 runs  
**Toss:** India

## Pakistan call for back-ups after injuries to Rauf and Naseem

**Colombo:** Pakistan are set to draft in back-ups for Haris Rauf and Naseem Shah with the pace duo looking doubtful for the remainder of the Asia Cup having sustained injuries during their Super Four stage defeat to India. Shahnawaz Dahani and Zaman Khan will come into the squad in Sri Lanka but no decision had been made yet regarding Rauf and Naseem, the Pakistan Cricket Board said in a statement. "This is only a precautionary measure keeping in mind the fitness and well-being of the players ahead of the ICC World Cup next month and the two will continue to remain under the observation of the team's medical panel," the PCB said.

Pakistan suffered a heavy defeat against their arch-rivals in a rain-hit Super Four contest played over two days. Rauf bowled five overs on Sunday before experiencing discomfort in his right side and sat out the reserve day's action.

Naseem left the field in the 49th over of India's innings on Monday with an injury to his bowling shoulder. India racked up 356-2 and then skittled out Pakistan for 128 in 32 overs to canter to a 228-run victory on Sunday. Rauf and Naseem did not bat and are likely to miss must-win Super Four match against Sri Lanka today, with their participation in the September 17 final also in doubt should Pakistan make it.

Pakistan's head coach Grant Bradburn said the heavy defeat against India was a "timely reminder" for the team to get their act together before next month's World Cup. "My gut feeling is that we are grateful for the gift that has been this last two days," Bradburn told reporters after the drubbing. "We don't get to play some of the best players in the world very often," he added.

"We haven't lost a game for the last three months, so it's a timely reminder that we need to turn up every day, put in our best on the park, and it's actually a gift in the last two days we haven't done that. We lost at all facets of the game," Bradburn said. "No excuses, we weren't good enough in the last two days."

Bradburn, a former New Zealand international who played seven Tests and 11 ODIs, said Pakistan will learn from the batting assault by India. "Certainly wasn't a surprise. Everyone's seen how lethal our bowling attack is and good teams will counteract that," he said.

THIRD ODI

# Markram and spinners shine as South Africa keep series alive

AFP  
Potchefstroom, South Africa

**S**outh Africa's spin bowlers backed up a century by Aiden Markram as the hosts ended Australia's winning streak with a 111-run victory in the third one-day international at the JB Marks Oval in Potchefstroom yesterday.

Markram hit 102 not out in a South African total of 338 for six. South Africa survived a furious assault by David Warner and Travis Head before bowling out Australia for 227. Australia won the first two games in the five-match series after sweeping a Twenty20 series 3-0.

The tourists looked on track for another win when Warner and Head thrashed 79 for the first wicket off only 48 balls. Australia were 104 for one at the end of the 10-over power play, the second time in a row they reached three figures while fielding restrictions were in place.

But left-arm spinners Tabraiz Shamsi (two for 29) and Keshav Maharaj (two for 37) changed the course of the match on a spin-friendly pitch before fast bowler Gerald Coetzee (four for 50) finished off the Australian innings. Maharaj also made a key intervention in the field with a direct-hit run-out of Warner, who made 78 off 56 balls before slipping and losing his shoe as he set off for a single.

"We needed a positive one," said South African captain Temba Bavuma. "The batters knuckled down and we were banking on the wicket assisting the spin bowlers and it's exactly what it did. The power play didn't go as well as we wanted but the way we clawed it back was exactly what we're looking for."

Australian captain Mitchell Marsh said the loss was "a little slip-up" in conditions which are likely to be replicated during the World Cup in India next month. "Hopefully we learnt a lot from it," he said.

"There were errors with bat and ball on which we could have improved. We go to



South Africa's Aiden Markram plays through the off side during the third ODI against Australia in Potchefstroom, South Africa, yesterday. (Reuters)

Centurion 2-1. I thought 290-300 was par. Thought I misread the pitch it a little bit, it spun. Markram showed his class. No doubt we'll be exposed to such conditions in the World Cup. We've generally played spin well, hope this was just a slip-up and we can jump back," Marsh added.

Quinton de Kock (82) and captain Temba Bavuma (57) gave South Africa an ideal start with an opening stand of 146 in 22.5 overs. But Australia were able to slow down the scoring, with part-time off-spinner Travis Head making good use of a slow, dry pitch to bowl unchanged and take two for 39 in 10 overs. Markram and Marco Jansen gave the

innings late impetus with a sixth-wicket partnership of 63 off 31 balls which was ended by a sensational diving left-handed catch by Sean Abbott on the cover boundary off Nathan Ellis.

**BRIEF SCORES**

**South Africa 338-6 in 50 overs** (A. Markram 102 not out, Q. de Kock 82, T. Bavuma 57; T. Head 2-39) **bt Australia 227 in 34.3 overs** (D. Warner 78; G. Coetzee 4-50, T. Shamsi 2-29, K. Maharaj 2-37)  
**Result:** South Africa won by 111 runs  
**Series:** Australia lead the 5-match series 2-1  
**Toss:** Australia

SPOTLIGHT

# Pacer Archer attends England training to revive hopes of World Cup role

AFP  
London

**J**ofra Archer attended England's training session at The Oval yesterday to spark hopes he could yet feature at next month's World Cup in India. Fast bowler Archer delivered the Super Over as England defeated New Zealand in a dramatic 2019 final at Lord's to become 50-over world champions.

But the 28-year-old's career has since been blighted by injuries and Archer has yet to feature in a competitive match this season following a stress fracture in his right elbow. As a result, he was left out of England's provisional 15-man squad for the World Cup but, should he prove his fitness, there is still time for him to be chosen as a travelling reserve.

He could then feature in India should a fellow England bowler be struck down by injury. Archer came off his long run for a significant spell during a net session as England trained ahead of today's third one-day international against New Zealand.

"He looks in a good place. I don't know where he's at fitness wise but he's bowling good wheels (pace) out there today (Tuesday)," David Willey, dropped from England's squad in 2019 to make way for Archer, said. "Everyone knows how good he is, what he's capable of and how he can impact games. So to have him close or not far away from being fit is obviously fantastic news."

Andrew Flintoff was also at The Oval as the former England captain continued his role as a mentor to the squad. Flintoff had been largely absent from public view since being in-



involved in a major car accident while filming the BBC television motoring programme Top Gear.

But the 45-year-old was encouraged to become involved with the England set-up again by friend and former teammate Rob Key, now the managing director of men's cricket at the England and Wales Cricket Board. "It's been great, to have him (Flintoff) with us is fantastic," said Willey. "He's a legend of the game, I grew up watching him play and to have him here with us, just his presence and everything he's done in the game, is fantastic."

SPOTLIGHT

# Halep gets four-year doping ban from tennis

AFP  
London

Former world number one **Simona Halep** has been given a four-year suspension from tennis for two doping offences, the International Tennis Integrity Agency said yesterday.

The 31-year-old Romanian has been provisionally suspended since October last year after testing positive for the blood-boosting substance Roxadustat at the 2022 US Open.

And in May the two-time Grand Slam singles champion was charged with a second anti-doping breach relating to irregularities in her Athlete Biological Passport (ABP).

Both charges have been upheld by an independent tribunal.

Halep, who has been provisionally suspended since October 2022, will not be able to play professional tennis again until

October 6 2026. But soon after the ITIA statement was released, Halep announced she would appeal the decision, saying: "Today (Tuesday), a tribunal under the tennis anti-doping programme announced a tentative decision in my case. The last year has been the hardest match of my life, and unfortunately my fight continues."

"I have devoted my life to the beautiful game of tennis. I take the rules that govern our sport very seriously and take pride in the fact I have never knowingly or intentionally used any prohibited substance. I refused to accept their decision of a four-year ban. I intend to appeal to The Court of Arbitration for Sport."

An independent tribunal, which heard evidence from Halep, the winner of the 2018 French Open and 2019 Wimbledon singles titles, met in London on June 28-29.

On September 11, the tribunal -- which also heard evidence from scientific experts and sifted

through some 8,000 pages of evidence - confirmed it had found Halep had committed intentional violations under tennis's anti-doping programme.

One of these was the use of Roxadustat discovered in her urine sample at the 2022 US Open, with the other breach based on collection and analysis of 51 blood samples provided by Halep as part of the ABP programme.

Roxadustat is a substance that can be used legitimately to treat anaemia.

But it is also on the World Anti-Doping Agency banned list as it is considered a blood-doping agent, which increases haemoglobin and the production of red blood cells.

The biological passport system is designed for the long-term monitoring of an athlete's blood indicators with the aim of identifying irregularities that could indicate doping.

Halep has claimed experts found she had accidentally taken a contaminated supplement.

But the ITIA said yesterday that while the tribunal accepted Halep had taken a contaminated supplement, they also "determined the volume the player ingested could not have resulted in the concentration of Roxadustat found in the positive sample".

ITIA chief executive Karen Moorhouse said: "After a complex and rigorous hearing process, we welcome the independent tribunal's decision."

She added: "The ITIA has followed the proper processes as we would with any other individual - in accordance with the world anti-doping code - fulfilling our purpose and responsibility to uphold the principle of fair competition, on behalf of the sport."

"The panel recognised that appropriate procedure had been followed within the written decision."

Moorhouse said that, given "the significant public interest", the full decision in Halep's case "will be published in due course".



CYCLING

# Vingegaard closes in on Vuelta lead after stage 16 win

'We had some terrible news and I wanted to win for my best friend today'

Reuters  
Rome

Jonas Vingegaard re-established the pecking order in the Jumbo-Visma team with a stunning victory on stage 16 of the Vuelta a Espana to move close to the overall lead yesterday.

The Dane, who retained his Tour de France title this year, went off like a rocket on the steep finish to the 120km run through the Cantabrian valleys to outclass the peloton.

His American team-mate Sepp Kuss struggled in the finale and lost more than a minute to Vingegaard but hangs on to the red jersey with a reduced buffer of 29 seconds.

Three-time Vuelta winner Primož Roglic completes a Jumbo-Visma top three in the GC standings and is 1:33 behind Kuss. Spain's Juan Ayuso (UAE Team Emirates) is fourth, 2:33 adrift.

The Jumbo-Visma team were reeling earlier yesterday after the news that their rider Nathan van Hooydonck was in hospital after suffering serious injuries in a car accident at home in Belgium after falling ill at the wheel.

Vingegaard, who counted on teammate Van Hooydonck's steadfast support during his ride to the Tour victory this year, looked emotional after crossing the finish line although there was better news about Van Hooydonck's condition.

"I'm just happy to win today because we had some terrible news this morning and I wanted to win for my best friend today," Vingegaard told Eurosport after his second stage win at this year's Vuelta.

"Luckyly now there is good news

about his condition and it's a big relief for me and for the team." After Monday's rest day there was no gentle return to action and although the stage from Liencres Playa was classified as flat until the steep finish, it was anything but relaxing.

The pace was relentless over the rolling terrain with the peloton trailing behind an escape group that contained Kaden Groves (Alpecin-Deceuninck) who topped up his points total.

Jumbo-Visma's pace ensured the breakaway was eventually reeled in and then it was every man for himself on the 4.8km slog to the finish with gradients reaching 15%.

Any notion that Kuss might be shepherded in to Bejes by Vingegaard and Roglic floundered as Vingegaard got out of his saddle and blasted up the slopes.

Finn Fisher-Black (UAE Team Emirates) tried to respond but finished second on the stage by 43 seconds with Wout Poels (Bahrain Victorious) six seconds further back. Roglic seemed in two minds whether to try and close the gap on Vingegaard or stay with Kuss and finished just over one minute behind to slip a place in the GC standings.

Today's stage concludes at the infamous Angliru climb when Vingegaard will be favourite to take the red jersey. Jumbo-Visma are poised to become the first team to win all three Grand Tours in a single season after Roglic won this year's Giro d'Italia.

Team Jumbo-Visma's Danish rider Jonas Vingegaard celebrates on the podium winning the stage 16 of the 2023 La Vuelta cycling in Bejes yesterday. (AFP)



RUGBY

# All Blacks want more ball-in-play at World Cup

Reuters  
Lyon

The All Blacks are hoping for more time with the ball-in-play during World Cup matches so that their renowned fitness can come into play as they look to kickstart their campaign after the opening loss to France.

Injured centre Jordie Barrett complained on Monday that the ball had been in play for just 27 minutes of the tournament opener against the hosts last Friday and scrum coach Greg Feek concurred on Tuesday.

"Yes, we would like to play more footy," he told reporters in the build-up to their second Pool A match against Namibia in Toulouse on Friday.

"Certainly, we want to get into a fast-paced game that suits us the style that we love to play. I think it was 44 minutes during one of the Bledisloe Cup games against Australia, so it's big difference."

Feek conceded that the heat-wave conditions in Paris during the first round of matches had contributed to the number of interruptions in the game, not least the extra water breaks allowed by World Rugby.

"At the weekend the ball was like soap so there's probably

more kicking involved in that strategy," he added.

"But who knows? It might change in two weeks time, you can see the weather's starting to change a little bit now. And if we can hold on to the ball, I'm excited about what can happen."

Dane Coles, who sat out the match against France, said making sure kicks from hand did not go into touch and taking quick lineout throws would help.

The veteran hooker, though, warned that the All Blacks might have to accept that they would not get more than 40 minutes of ball-in-play at this World Cup, nor be able to rely on their opposition fading through fatigue.

"At the World Cup, people turn up on the day and that pressure and that intent can do funny things to you," he said. "You can run 20 kilometres because you're playing for your country and stuff like that."

Coles joined Feek in backing loosehead prop Ethan de Groot to bounce back after a torrid evening in the scrum at the Stade de France last week.

"He's still a young All Black, you people have got to realise," Coles said.

"When he came on the scene he was the man, doing the damage, and that's just part of the journey a young front rower has to take."

TENNIS

# Wawrinka mocks empty stands for Davis Cup in Manchester

AFP  
London

Stan Wawrinka poked fun at the former organisers of the Davis Cup, ex-footballer Gerard Pique's Kosmos company, over the sparse crowds for Switzerland's tie against France in Manchester yesterday.

The three-time Grand Slam champion played in Switzerland's 2014 Davis Cup triumph, when they beat France in the final, under the old format of knock-out ties played home

and away. Kosmos changed the tournament in 2019 to include a group stage which is now played in several cities across Europe.

It has been widely criticised for causing late finishes and smaller crowds.

"Thank you Gerard Pique and the ITF!... lol!" the 38-year-old Wawrinka posted on X, formerly known as Twitter, along with a video showing the largely empty Manchester Arena. Wawrinka and Roger Federer starred for the Swiss in their only previous Davis Cup title victory, downing France at a packed Stade Pierre-Mauroy in Lille.



Switzerland's Marc-Andrea Huesler (right) and Stan Wawrinka in action against France's Nicolas Mahut and Edouard Roger-Vasselin during their doubles Davis Cup finals Group B match at the AO Arena in Manchester yesterday. (AFP)

# LeBron, Curry among NBA stars eyeing Paris Olympics: reports

NBA superstars **LeBron James** and Stephen Curry are among several top players interested in competing for the United States at next year's Paris Olympics, according to multiple reports on Monday.

Two-time Olympic champion and four-time NBA champion James has been recruiting fellow NBA stars for a US squad that seeks a fifth gold medal in a row next year in France, according to The Athletic.

Curry, a four-time NBA champion guard with the Golden State Warriors, has expressed a desire to play on the Olympic squad guided by Warriors coach Steve Kerr, ESPN reported.

The news comes a day after a US team of 20-something NBA stars left the Basketball World Cup empty handed following losses to Canada in the bronze-medal game and to eventual champion Germany in a semi-final. James, a 38-year-old forward, led the USA to Olympic gold in 2008 at Beijing and 2012 at London but has not played since.

He knows the sting of defeat on the global stage, however, having been a reserve on the 2004 US squad that settled for bronze at the Athens Olympics and a 2006 team that took bronze at the Basketball World Cup.

James is not only interested in playing for Paris Olympic gold but has called fellow former NBA Most Valuable Players Curry and Kevin Durant hoping to entice them to play in 2024.

Two-time NBA champion Durant, a Phoenix Suns forward who turns 35 later this month, helped US Olympic gold-medal efforts in London as well as 2016 in Rio and in 2021 at Tokyo. Curry has never played for the US Olympic squad but helped American clubs win the 2010 and 2014 World Cup crowns -- their only such titles since 1994.

Others James has recruited for the 2024 US Olympic team, according to The Athletic, include his Los Angeles Lakers teammate Anthony Davis, Golden State's Draymond Green and Boston's Jayson Tatum.

Phoenix's Devin Booker, a three-time NBA All-Star, and 38-year-old Chris Paul of Golden State, a 2008 and 2012 gold medalist, are also among those ESPN said are interested in the Paris Olympics.

(AFP)



## Qatar finish with three wins out of three at U-23 Asian Cup Qualifiers



Qatar's under-23 team capped their fine performance at the AFC U-23 Asian Cup Qatar 2024 Qualifiers with a 1-0 win over Kyrgyzstan in Changwon, South Korea, yesterday. Ilyes Brimil's 52nd minute goal handed the Al Annabi young guns their third straight victory after they stunned South Korea 2-0 and thrashed Myanmar 6-0 in their first two Group B matches. Being the hosts, Qatar are automatically qualified for the Finals and the Ilijo Vale-coached side took part in the event for exposure. Yesterday, Qatar started their final group tie with a spring in their step at the Changwon Football Centre. For Kyrgyzstan, the match was a chance to end their campaign with a win after a 1-1 draw with Myanmar and 1-0 defeat to South Korea had dashed their qualification hopes. But Brimil's effort settled the proceedings and Qatar can look forward to next year's Finals with confidence. Qatar will host the AFC U-23 Asian Cup from April 15 to May 3, 2024.



Qatar's Ilyes Brimil celebrates after scoring against Kyrgyzstan in Changwon, South Korea, yesterday

### SPOTLIGHT

# Troubled Pogba sinks to new low after doping revelation

Pogba has started in one match since returning to Juve as free agent

AFP  
Milan

Once the most expensive footballer in the world, France star Paul Pogba has sunk to a new low after being provisionally suspended for a doping violation. Injuries and a bizarre blackmail plot involving his own brother have dominated his second spell at Juventus, and the latest revelations came just as the midfielder looked ready to get back to his best.

Italy's anti-doping authority NADO revealed on Monday night that Pogba, who is still only 30, showed elevated levels of testosterone in a test taken after Juve's season-opening win at Udinese, a match in which he did not even play. Pogba has since been a substitute in Juve's other two Serie A matches and despite picking up a thigh knock against Empoli earlier this month could well have featured in Saturday's home fixture against Lazio had he not been dealt the latest of a series of blows to his career.

The test result came soon after the release of an interview with *Al Jazeera* in which he said he wanted to make his critics "eat their words". "I want to show them I'm not weak. They can talk bad about me. I will never give up," he said.

He has only started one match since returning to Juve as a free agent from Manchester United in July last year, six years after leaving the Turin giants for a then world record 105 million euros with four Italian league titles to his name. It was a move which was supposed to regenerate his career which had gone stale in England, but he almost immediately suffered a serious knee injury in pre-season.

And his initial decision to not undergo surgery in a bid to make the Qatar World Cup eventually back-fired, ending his chances of helping France defend their world title and further complicating his club campaign. Pogba was a key figure in the 2018 triumph in Russia and scored one of France's goals in their 4-2 win over Croatia in that year's final, but he has not featured for his country since a friendly win for Les Bleus over South Africa in March last year.

From being on top of the world Pogba has slowly slipped down to the depths, ravaged by injuries and a difficult personal life which he admits has been adversely affected by the vast sums of money earned by football's top players. "Money changes people. It can break up a family. It can create a war," he said. "Sometimes I was just by myself thinking, 'I don't want to have money anymore. I just don't want to play anymore. I just want to be with normal people,



Paul Pogba re-joined Italian giants Juventus on a free transfer in July 2022 after his contract expired at Manchester United. (Reuters)

so they will love me for me – not for the fame, not for the money?"

Pogba speaks from bitter experience, as a month after tearing knee ligaments his brother Mathias released a video in which he threatened to reveal secrets about his superstar sibling. French investigators were later told of how he was held at gun point by childhood friends and two hooded men armed with assault rifles, who lambasted him for not helping them out finan-

cially and demanded 13 million euros.

Pogba ended up paying 100,000 euros of the sum and the affair taught him that "the only people who can hurt are the people who are close to you". "They're the ones who can destroy you," he told *Al Jazeera*. Pogba faces an anxious wait for the result of his 'B' sample, with the spectre of a potential four-year ban hanging over a player whose life has turned into something of a nightmare.

### EURO QUALIFIERS

## Fernandes shines as Portugal thrash Luxembourg 9-0

AFP  
Barcelona

Bruno Fernandes ran the show for Portugal as they romped to a record 9-0 win over Luxembourg on Monday night without suspended talisman and all-time top goalscorer Cristiano Ronaldo. Roberto Martinez's side have now won all six of their Euro qualifying games, without conceding a single goal and scoring 24 themselves, with this the country's largest ever victory.

Portugal lead the Group J standings, five points clear of Slovakia in second place, whom they beat in Bratislava on Friday. Luxembourg are third, three points behind Slovakia.

Manchester United playmaker Fernandes, who scored Portugal's winner against Slovakia, laid on three goals as the Selecao filled their boots and scored one himself. Goncalo Ramos, Diogo Jota and Goncalo Inacio struck two goals each, while Ricardo Horta and Joao Felix also scored. Martinez, who replaced Fernando Santos after the Qatar World Cup, has a 100 percent record at the helm to date.

"We are still at the beginning of a new era with a new coach and we are still taking on board the coach's ideas," said Jota. "Today we set a reference point match (to look at in) the future."

Sporting Lisbon defender Inacio sent the hosts ahead in the 12th minute with a header from Fernandes' exquisite cross with the outside of his foot.

Paris Saint-Germain striker Ramos drilled home the second five minutes later after Fernandes pressed high to win the ball back.

The 22-year-old striker then grabbed another goal in the 33rd minute with a clever turn and clinical finish for his sixth goal in eight appearances for his country. Liverpool striker Jota hit the crossbar as Portugal dominated at the Algarve stadium near the country's south coast.

Inacio headed home his second goal from another Fernandes cross on the stroke of half-time and Jota struck early in the second half for the fifth, set up by the Red Devils midfielder again. Portugal thrashed Luxembourg 6-0 in their first clash in the Grand Duchy and Horta rifled home from the edge of the box for their sixth of the night to match the haul.

Jota, who set up Horta, walked home the seventh as Portugal continued pushing on without remorse, and Fernandes capped his virtuoso display by netting the eighth. That matched their previous best win, 8-0 on three occasions, but substitute Felix struck a superb ninth from the edge of the box to set Portugal's new record.

"We have a great group of players, we take every game very seriously," said Horta. "We're on the right track, but we have things to improve. Against Slovakia we played a game that was not at the level this team (can offer)."

Martinez's side can qualify for Euro 2024 on October 13 if they beat Slovakia and Luxembourg fail to beat Iceland.



Portugal's Bruno Fernandes (left) scores against Luxembourg during the Euro 2024 Qualifier in Alcantara, Portugal. (Reuters)

## Former Spanish football chief Rubiales summoned to appear in court

**Madrid:** Former Spanish football federation president Luis Rubiales must appear in court on Friday in connection with the investigation into his forcible kiss on Jenni Hermoso's lips after the Women's World Cup final. Rubiales has been summoned to appear at 1200 local time (1000 GMT) before an examining magistrate "to be heard as an accused" and to respond to accusations of "sexual assault", a Madrid court said in a statement yesterday. The 46-year-old kissed Hermoso following Spain's triumph in Sydney on August 20, which she says was not consensual, while Rubiales insists it was.

Judge Francisco de Jorge of the Na-

tional Court admitted a complaint against Rubiales on Monday filed by Spanish prosecutors last week regarding alleged "crimes of sexual assault and coercion". Under a recent reform of the Spanish penal code, a non-consensual kiss can be considered sexual assault, a criminal category that groups together all types of sexual violence.

The penalties for a forced kiss can range from a fine to four years in prison, according to sources from the public prosecutors' office. Rubiales stepped down as the Spanish football federation's president on Sunday but continued to defend himself over the kiss. "I have faith in the truth

and I will do everything in my power so that it prevails," Rubiales wrote in an open letter. Hermoso, 33, who plays for Mexican club Pachuca, accused Rubiales of pressuring her to speak out in his defence immediately after the furore over the kiss erupted, which prosecutors said could be considered a crime of coercion.

### LEIPZIG'S OLMO, ORBAN TO MISS SEVERAL WEEKS WITH INJURY

RB Leipzig will have to do without forward Dani Olmo and captain Willi Orban for several weeks after both players picked up knee injuries on international duty, the Bundesliga club confirmed. Spain forward

Olmo will miss "a few games" while Hungary defender Orban "will be out for ten weeks", the German Cup winners tweeted.

Olmo returned from Spain duty earlier in the week and underwent tests to diagnose the injury to his right knee. The forward, who extended his deal at the club until 2027 in June, has been in stellar form for Leipzig this season, scoring five goals and assisting once in four competitive games.

Orban also injured his right knee. Leipzig host Augsburg this Saturday, before travelling to face Swiss side Young Boys Bern next Tuesday in the Champions League.

### FORMER FRANCE GOALKEEPER COLONNA DIES AGED 95

Dominique Colonna, one of the last surviving members of the France squad that reached the semi-finals of the 1958 World Cup, has died aged 95, his former club Reims announced. Colonna won 13 caps for France, making his debut against Iceland in 1957 and his final appearance against Spain four years later. In the middle of that span he travelled to Sweden with a France team that boasted the legendary Just Fontaine who scored 13 goals, still a record for a single World Cup tournament. Colonna, however, who was unusually short for a goalkeeper.